

KEEPING THE DUTCH PRINTED HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The acquisition of a 'unique' printed book from The Hague¹

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One of the tasks of a national library is to collect and keep the national printed heritage of a specific country. In this article the author discusses how this is managed for early modern imprints (books up to 1801) in the KB | National Library of The Netherlands. Through the acquisition of a very rare book – Humphrey Bland, Eene verhandeling over de militaire discipline (The Hague 1740) – she demonstrates how the Short-Title Catalogue Netherlands (STCN) and other national and international catalogues help to identify unique copies. These should be acquired to keep the Dutch printed heritage available for future generations.

Keywords: collection retrieval; early print; heritage; KB; libraries



The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) in The Hague is the national library of the Netherlands. National libraries have many tasks on a national library level. They coordinate activities in the library world in a specific country, make sure that all libraries cooperate, design library strategies in

a developing world, establish national and international networks and collect a country's national heritage in printed and, nowadays, also in electronic form. In the Netherlands, the situation with regard to that last task is exceptional. Almost all countries have adopted a law to regulate legal deposit, establishing by law that of

every printed book, one or more copies must be sent to the national library.² Countries such as France and Britain have had a legal deposit since 1537 and 1610 respectively.³ The Netherlands is missing from the lists of countries with a legal deposit because it does not have one. Since 1974, the Netherlands does, however, have a voluntary deposit. Publishers are encouraged to send books to the KB, where they are kept for eternity – at least, that is what we would like. So almost all publications published in the Netherlands since 1974 are kept at the KB. But what about the ones published before that date? Are these available at the KB as well?

The national printed heritage of the Netherlands

The answer to this question is a clear ‘no’. The KB was established in 1798, when the collections of stadtholder William V, who had fled to England because of the revolution of the Patriots, were confiscated to become a library for the government. He had collected a library for his own use and his aim had not been to collect every book printed in The Republic. Neither did the early librarians of the KB try to acquire a copy of every book that came on the market. From this, it can be concluded that the KB does not hold a copy of every publication printed in the Netherlands up to 1974.

Since the Netherlands is a small country, this is not a very big problem. Researchers can easily travel to other research libraries in the country to study unique

books. Especially since all books printed in The Netherlands up to 1800 are described in the Short-Title Catalogue Netherlands (STCN). This bibliography was started in the 1980s and new titles are still added to it every day. At the moment, about 210,000 books in 600,000 copies kept in public collections in the Netherlands and abroad, have been described in this bibliography of the early modern period (up to and including 1800).⁴ The STCN can guide researchers looking for a specific book, but curators of rare books and librarians developing their collection can also use the STCN to find out if an early modern book on offer is already available in a public heritage institution in the Netherlands. Research libraries tend to have a defined focus area. In general, university libraries acquire books printed in the town where their university is based. Thus, Leiden University Libraries buy Leiden imprints, Amsterdam University Library Amsterdam imprints, the KB The Hague imprints, etc.

Most libraries have one or more specific fields of interest. Leiden, for example, is very strong in publications of and about the Dutch Revolt, the KB and Amsterdam both collect almanacs, the KB is strong in travel journals, occasional writings, pamphlets, and official publications. Moreover, the KB has the additional task of acquiring publications that are not collected by other Dutch major libraries, and for this task the STCN is indispensable. This latter task is increasing since more and more libraries have decided not to invest in the expansion of their

heritage collections. For instance, Utrecht University Library and the heritage collection of the former Stadsbibliotheek Haarlem (now in the Noord-Hollands Archief) no longer regularly acquire early printed books. They curate their heritage collections and prioritize investing in digitization and supplying researchers with modern digital and printed books and journals. This is also a priority of the KB, but besides that, the KB wants to keep our shared heritage for future generations. As a curator of the KB, I therefore try to find unique Dutch imprints at auctions, in antiquarian bookseller's catalogues and on the Internet, acquire them for the KB and add them to the national printed heritage of the Netherlands, where they will also be made available in digitized form. And newly acquired books are, of course, also described in the STCN. According to the STCN, in 2017, the KB acquired, through purchase and donations, 66 unique copies i.e. copies not present in the collection of one of the libraries described by the STCN. Hereafter I will discuss one of them.

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A Dutch translation of Humphrey Bland, A Treatise of Military Discipline

On the 1st of October 2017, I visited the Amsterdam International Antiquarian Book & Map Fair at the Marriott Hotel in Amsterdam.⁵ More than 40 an-

tiquarian booksellers from the Netherlands and abroad offered a wealth of beautiful books for sale. Walking around one gets overwhelmed by the number of rare, special, unique, and wonderful books. Some of the precious books at offer I knew very well, such as the splendid book on wood by Martinus Houttuyn and Jan Christiaan Sepp, or the description of the East and West Indies by Joris van Spilbergen and Jacob Le Maire. I checked other interesting books in the KB catalogue, the STCN and the national library system Picarta. Most of the books I checked were either already in the KB, or in another Dutch library.

Then I came across a book in a simple parchment binding by an author I did not know: Humphrey Bland.⁶ It has almost 600 pages and contains some folding illustrations. A common bulky book, which I expected to be present

in some of the Dutch libraries, but it turned out that none of them owns a copy of this edition. It even has a The Hague imprint and I decided to buy it for the KB, thereby adding it to the national printed heritage kept in Dutch public collections.⁷

It is remarkable that no copy of this book was present in any of the Dutch libraries whose collections are described in the national library systems Picarta and the STCN.⁸ It is a Dutch translation of Bland's treatise on military discipline, originally published in 1727 in London and Dublin. The author Humphrey Bland was an army officer born in Ireland in 1685/6, who served in the army from 1704 to 1756.⁹ He was stationed in the Low Countries during the War of the Spanish Succession (1710-1714) and was wounded at the Battle of Almenara (1710). In the introduction of his book he states that he used his own experiences to write this treatise, in order to educate a new generation of soldiers that had not yet had the chance to participate in wars. Bland's conviction was that the most important characteristic of a successful army is discipline, and that idea constitutes the core of his treatise. In a very structured manner, in 20 chapters divided into several articles, Bland treats all aspects of the army. He describes exercises, how to handle weapons, how to attack, how an army should be commanded, how soldiers should run watch, and so on. Six folding illustrations support his text. The treatise was very popular and reprinted many times: in 1734, 1740, 1743, 1746, and 1753. After that, two revised editions by Sir William Fawcett were published in

1759 and 1762.¹⁰

Two booksellers and printers from The Hague, brothers Ottho and Pieter van Thol, published the Dutch translation of the work. The Van Thols were an important printers' family of The Hague. Father Pieter (I) van Thol started his business around 1690. From 1730 Ottho joined the firm and the father's position was later taken over by Ottho's brother Pieter (II) van Thol. The brothers worked together from 1739 up to 1755; they then decided to split the firm and each continued on his own.¹¹ At the time, many booksellers in The Hague published in French, but the Van Thols focused on Dutch works. The translation of Bland's book fits perfectly in their publications' list. In his preface the translator states that the publishers decided to have the treatise translated and published because no such work existed in Dutch and they thought that many officers would benefit from it. The STCN shows that a book on military discipline did indeed not exist at that time. But from 1590 onwards, a number of official publications (*artikelbrief*) on military discipline was produced. Still, the book must have been very useful for officers and must have been used in the army. It is, therefore, remarkable that no copy could be found in the major libraries of the Netherlands.

Lessons from this book

Army men will have learned many lessons from this book, but we can also extract some lessons from the acquisition of this copy. First of all, although the STCN

strives to describe all publications ever published in the Netherlands, the STCN is not complete and never will be because some books have disappeared. Over time, some books were heavily used, got worn out, and were eventually thrown away. The STCN worked in all major libraries in the Netherlands, but as we have seen these libraries do not keep a copy of every book published. The curators of these libraries try to expand their collections with unique copies and the KB has a special role in this and tries to complement the national heritage collection in public collections in the Netherlands by searching and acquiring copies of books not yet described in the national library catalogues of the Netherlands.

Another lesson is that unique might not be unique, since collections not described

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in these national catalogues may hold another copy of such a book, as we saw with the book of Bland.

Cataloguers of the STCN still travel around in the Netherlands to describe books in collections not yet included in the STCN, but their number is limited – only two part-time bibliographers at the moment. The acquisition of this book shows that the work must go on to get a good overview of the national printed heritage in The Netherlands. And we should also look abroad. The Netherlands was once “the bookshop of the world”. Books printed in the Netherlands are found in libraries worldwide, from Sweden to Salamanca and from Saint Petersburg to New York. These collections also need to be searched for Dutch imprints and the KB is envisaging projects to make this happen. The work never stops.



¹ With thanks to Marja Smolenaars for editing the English of this article.

² For an overview of countries with a legal deposit, see: Wikipedia, ‘Legal deposit - Wikipedia’, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_deposit> (30 January 2018).

³ Larivihre, *Guidelines for Legal Deposit Legislation: a revised and updated edition of the 1981 publication by Dr. Jean LUNN* (Paris: UNESCO, 2000), p. 6.

⁴ For information about the STCN, see: KB, ‘Short-Title Catalogue, Netherlands (STCN) |

Koninklijke Bibliotheek' <www.kb.nl/en/organisation/research-expertise/for-libraries/short-title-catalogue-netherlands-stcn> (1 February 2018).

⁵ For this fair, see: Amsterdam International Antiquarian Book & Map Fair; 'Home – Amsterdam International Antiquarian Book & Map Fair', <amsterdambookfair.net/home/> (1 February 2018); UvA, Reinder Storm, 'Blogs UvA Erfgoed - Antiquarian Book Fair 2017', <<http://www.blogs-uva-erfgoed.nl/antiquarian-book-fair-2017/>> (1 February 2018).

⁶ H. Bland, *Eene verhandeling over de militaire discipline; in welke de plicht van officiers en soldaaten, in de verscheide graden van den krygsdienst, te needergesteld en verklaard is*. Translated after the 2nd edition by Gerard Westerwyk (The Hague: Ottho en Pieter van Thol, 1740). Now: The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW GW A113898.

⁷ WorldCat gives three other copies worldwide: Skokloster Slott Library (Sweden), Zurich, ETH-Bibliothek (Switzerland) and Zürich, Landesbibliothek (Switzerland).

⁸ It turned out later that there is a copy in The Netherlands, in the Nationaal Militair Museum. This collection is not yet catalogued in collaborative systems. With thanks to Marja Smolenaars.

⁹ J.A. Houlding, 'Bland, Humphrey (1685/6-1763)', in H.C.G. Matthew & B. Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 6. (2004), pp. 158-160. With more references.

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

¹ See: E.F. Kossmann, *De boekhandel te 's-Gravenhage tot het eind van de 18^{de} eeuw* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1937), pp. 395-404. The book is listed on p. 404.